

## **PART I.**

**Valentine K. Ako**

**Oral History Interview**

**January 8 & 9, 1996**

**with Kepā Maly**

**(Personal Release of  
Interview Records Dated –  
May 21<sup>st</sup> 1996<sup>1</sup>)**

Valentine K. Ako (uncle Val) was born at Hōlualoa, North Kona, in 1926. He is descended from families with many generations of residency in North Kona. On the paternal side of his family, he is descended from the Ka'iliauua-Napu'upahe'e lines (of Kealakehe), and on his maternal side, he is descended from the Kanoholani Kai'amakini line. Additionally, the family has many interrelations to the families of Kona, tying them to many of the *ahupua'a* of the Kekaha region.



**Valentine K. Ako at John Ka'elemakule's Mahai'ula home (built 1880) in the background (Nov. 1997).**

(Uncle Val's elder brother, Kinoulu Kahananui, raised at Kalaoa is also a participant in the Honokōhau interview program.)

In the 1930s-1940s, Uncle Val spent a great deal of time with his own *kūpuna* and other elder native residents of North Kona. The primary activities that uncle participated in were fishing and gathering salt between Keauhou to Kīholo.

Uncle Val was taught about the *ko'a* (fisheries, fishing stations and triangulation marks), and various resources of the coastal lands that were, and remain important to the natives of Kona. The section of the interview cited below, includes descriptions of the *ko'a* fronting Honokōhau and Kaloko, as well as those of neighboring lands to the north and south. He describes the protocols of fisheries management and maintenance (including care of the fishponds). The interview also includes interesting accounts of the importance of the fish of the Honokōhau-Kaloko fishponds in the larger community, and how fish were transported to Kailua. Today, uncle Val is recognized around the State as one of the important elder Hawaiian fishermen, and is a participant in a number of marine fisheries programs.

Because of the time spent along the shores of Honokōhau and Kaloko, and the various relationships which his family shares with native residents of the coastal region, uncle Val is very knowledgeable about the old families and connections of those families to others tied to Honokōhau and Kaloko.

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<sup>1</sup> With follow up discussions and verbal release on September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2000.

(Interview conducted while sitting at Kaloko Fishpond, describing the fisheries and fishermen of Honokōhau-Kaloko and neighboring lands of Kona in the 1930s-1940s):

- KM: ...You also mentioned that the fishpond here at Kaloko...now, the fishpond wall was narrower and built up higher, yeah?
- VA: Yes, the wall, it was high and there was two kahe, one on the Kailua side and one on the north side.
- KM: Can you explain? The kahe is the channel that runs between...?
- VA: Yeah that's the main channel from the ocean into the pond for the screen.
- KM: And had the kahe...?
- VA: At the kahe, there was a screen that separated the small fish from the big fish. They made it so that the 'ama'ama or whatever, baby awa would pass through either way, and that way they were able to not plant the fish in the pond, because automatically, it will feed itself you know. And that's the way...that's reason, when they made the kahe, they made it in such a way, that the big fish wasn't able to go out, but the small fish were able to go either way.
- KM: Ah-haa, so there was a mākāhā like...?
- VA: Yeah.
- KM: ...a gate...?
- VA: Yeah.
- KM: ...that was operated between... What, you'd said you remembered what the wood was they made the mākāhā from up there [pointing to the uplands above Kaloko vicinity].
- VA: Yeah, it's made out of 'ōhi'a, or later, from kiawe, nothing less than that.
- KM: So 'ōhi'a would have been the olden days one?
- VA: Yeah, yeah. Could retain the salt and it would last longer. But, you know, when they made those mākāhā out of 'ōhi'a and everything, everything was done green. Because when the 'ōhi'a is green, you can nail it through. And in many instances they used wooden pegs. How they built it, I do not know. But, if they didn't have any metal implements, it was pegged into the foundation. And then they would pile all the stone, and they did it in such a way that even in rough water, the mākāhā wouldn't break.
- KM: Hmm! You'd said that the base of the pond wall was wider.
- VA: Yeah, was wider.
- KM: And it came up narrower?
- VA: Yeah.
- KM: About how high do you think the wall was, if you stood at the base ?
- VA: Gee, it was higher than me.
- KM: Was higher than you, and what...

VA: If I stood down, below, and stood up, it was about ten feet high.

KM: So not like now, it's all leveled and spread out flat...

VA: Yeah.

KM: It's maybe 30 feet wide in some places.

VA: Yeah. No the thing was high.

KM: Narrower and high?

VA: Yeah.

KM: You pointed out earlier this morning, you had shared the story about the honu [turtles], where the turtle hale was like, where they catch the turtles?

VA: Yeah.

KM: And then... So I took a picture of that area. Now you said on the Kohanaiki side of the fishpond wall had some ko'a.

VA: 'Ōpelu ko'a, yeah, on the Kohanaiki side of Kaloko.

KM: And that ko'a is built up of stone, like a platform. and they fish out there?

VA: Yeah. We fished for 'ōpelu out there on that ko'a. Even up 'O'oma 1 and 2, there were two ko'a over there that we also used. And Akuiwa and I fished in that area. And in that particular area, none of the old 'ōpelu fishermen were using that ko'a, so Akuiwa and I were using taro and flour. So we never intruded with other ko'a. Where other fishermen didn't use the ko'a, we would use our bait, but we would let the other fishermen know what we were using for the bait, you know, what the chum was. So that they wouldn't intrude, they could use the ko'a, but just had to use the same type of palu.

KM: Now, you'd also mentioned that you had to train kind of the fish...

VA: Yes.

KM: You would go steady, morning and evening like that.

VA: It was a must to retain the ko'a, that even if we didn't go out to fish. The old timers always went out with their pū'olo to feed the fish, to retain them.

KM: So you trained them?

VA: Yeah, yeah.

KM: The fish were trained, and you'd use...?

VA: Then you...a certain time, you would have to go out there at the certain time of the day, you see. And I know for a fact that it used to be 4:30 in the afternoon, I would be going out. So when you feed that the group of fish, the next morning when you feed 'em, they're going to be there. But how you going...because when you go out to the ground, so you paipai [urge the fish up] you know, with your paddle and you hit the side of the canoe and automatically, the whole school will come.

KM: Were their ko'a was... Now you also said that at other areas, there were ko'a as well?

VA: Yes, like the ko'a 'ōpelu that was right outside of Maka'eo.

KM: So, right outside?

VA: Yeah, right there.

KM: The Pai...and whose house? Ka'iliwai?

VA: Ka'iliwai was there first then the old man, Pai.

KM: So they had one ko'a 'ōpelu right outside here.

VA: Yeah.

KM: So in between their house and Maka'eo.

VA: Yeah.

KM: As you keep going down, like if you come in...now you described a little bit, had some ko'a in front of like your folks' place by Ocean View [restaurant]. Were there ko'a that you fished like at Kahului or at Puapua'a, Hōlualoa?

VA: Oh, yeah. Each little cove had a ko'a outside of it. So evidently the kūpuna may have trained the fish in their particular area, and that's the reason why, even outside my tūtū place [on the north side of Oneō Bay] there was a ko'a out there, but that ko'a was inter-related to the Kailua ko'a. The Kailua ko'a, that's where, like I said, everybody used to take chance to go. If you miss, the next fisherman is going. But there were selfish fishermen who, they weren't satisfied... So if you had a fisherman like George Ka'iliwai, when his chance came, and the guy was in the way, he'd fix 'um up. He just spread all his bait, he'd spread 'um all on the surface. And that's when the 'ōpelu are going to feed. Because they going be full and they ho'olili [all rise to the surface, agitating the surface], eh. So because of the fisherman that did bad, everybody was going home, eh.

There were times that they came on the shore and, you know, throw blows, terrible fights. You know, Ka'iliwai, they couldn't...because Ka'iliwai had only one leg, eh. But, Ka'iliwai never did bad...

KM: So they were disrespectful of his fishing right.

VA: Yeah, yeah... ...You know, there are different varieties of awa. The deep sea awa they call awa'aua. It's sort of like a cross between awa and 'ō'io , and now, they sometimes call 'em Pākē awa. That's what the awa'aua is. And then you have awa kalamoho, it's a big awa. It's on the shore and in the pond, big large ones... [gesturing with hands]

KM: Oh, Three feet kind!

VA: Yeah, that's awa kalamoho. Why do they name 'em? They had a purpose for naming them, you know. So that's how we used to distinguish them. Certain fishermen caught the Pākē awa, or awa'aua, and then they say, "Oh, I caught awa kalamoho." And in Kona, way back when I was a little boy, the Honokōhau and Kaloko fishponds were the fishponds that supplied Hilo and Kona with awa and mullet. And when we had pā'ina or lū'au, and we didn't have kālua awa, the party wasn't complete. You had to have awa. And people say, "Oh, you know,

when you go kālua the awa get plenty bones.” But our kūpuna knew how to eat the awa. They never eat ‘em hot; they eat ‘em cold so when you pick up the meat, the bones stay back. In spite of all that bones, and that’s how they enjoyed it, you know. It was always kālua awa... And another thing, if they didn’t have that, they would have dry aku, and kālua the dry aku, you know, in a wrapper.

KM: Oh like a ti leaf wrapper?

VA: Yeah ti. How you make a regular laulau. And that we used to kālua and it taste like smoke meat, you know. But it had to be dried and when you take ‘em out of the lāī it has a nice smell eh. And that’s how tūtū and daddy used to do, when they didn’t have any awa. That’s what they would use.

...You know, Kaloko and Honokōhau, they don’t have the resources now, that we had during our day. A man was always the caretaker. When I was older, it was a Filipino man and a Pākē man that used to take care of Kaloko and Honokōhau....

KM: Were there Hawaiian families still living down Kaloko or Honokōhau when you were a child or was it mostly the...?

VA: Had the old man Kanakamaika’i and his wife, Makapini, and some other ‘ohana sometimes, but later it was the Filipino.

KM: A Filipino caretaker. Hmm...

VA: Like me, my family we had fishing rights along this whole coastline. But we didn’t take that... abuse that privilege because it wasn’t necessary for us to go during our time, because we had ample supply right within this area. So if I fished down Puapua’a, I’d never go beyond to...occasionally we would go to Hōlualoa beach but I would fish about from here [Kaiakeakua] to Maka’eo and on to Kaloko if I wanted to catch certain species. Like if I wanted to catch turtle, I would go to Kaloko.

KM: You said, there’s a in the ocean in front of Kaloko. There’s a...

VA: A cone-like shape for that was...

KM: ...built up? And that was...?

VA: For turtles.

KM: You called it turtle house?

VA: Yeah, yeah, yeah, that’s the one. You see, at that time, Honokōhau, the fishpond, you know, that sandy area, the turtles used to lay eggs over there. I don’t know if they do today. And we...nobody fiddled around with them, when they went up to lay their eggs.

KM: No one messed with them?

VA: No, no, no, no. It was sort of...we, our people, they respected. I mean they feel if there was a spawning ground or whatever, that was theirs. Because very few of our Hawaiians ate turtle. And my family didn’t eat turtle until I went ahead and caught the turtle...

But, where that turtle house was, they used to go lay eggs on the Honokōhau side. And that's the reason why over there used to get plenty turtles. Yeah the biggest...I caught a 400 pounder. And you know it was surprising when I think back how I was able to bring it on board the canoe eh, take 'em home, cut 'em all up. You know, there's a rich history about that place...

KM: Earlier, you mentioned the caretaker at Honokōhau, Kaloko side, and how they'd transport the awa like that to Kailua?

VA: Yes, when I was young, old man Polto was the caretaker of Kaloko. During Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's, our kūpuna looked forward to having awa and 'anae in the pā'ina. Old Polto used to catch the fish about ten o'clock in the night, and by two o'clock in the morning, he had it all packed up on the donkey, and they trained a dog and the donkey to transport the fish from Kaloko-Honokōhau to Kailua, at Henry Akona's fish market. And in traveling from two in the morning, by five 'o clock in the morning, the fish on the donkey would be at Henry Akona's market. This was done repeatedly during the holidays, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's. 'Cause our kūpuna...the menu, if we didn't have awa, raw awa and lāwalu awa or kālua awa, the menu wouldn't be complete without this special fish.

KM: 'Ae...